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ABSTRACT

Project STEPS (Sequenced Transition to Education in the Public Schools) was a federally funded demonstration grant to develop a community-wide interagency process for the transition of children with disabilities from preschool to the public schools. Participants were the local public schools and seven programs serving preschool children with special needs. After program development, an outreach project began to disseminate and replicate the STEPS model throughout Kentucky. Through the outreach project, a statewide training and technical assistance network is being put into place to aid transition from early intervention programs to preschool programs and from preschool programs to school-age programs. The transition model has evolved to include all children with and without disabilities. The four components of the STEPS model are interagency coordination and policy development, staff development, family involvement, and child preparation. Project products include the "ACCESS Handbook" (a generic guide to supplemental services available to parents and families), the Helpful Entry Level Skills Checklist--Revised Edition, the Instructional Strategies Manual (Second Edition), and the Replication Manual (Second Edition). (JDD)

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STEPS AWARENESS PACKET

Project STEPS (Sequenced Transition to Education in the Public Schools) was a three year federally funded demonstration grant awarded to the Child Development Centers of the Bluegrass, Lexington, Kentucky, in 1984-1987. This project developed a community-wide interagency process for the transition of children with disabilities from preschool (sending agency) to the public schools (receiving agency). Participants in the project were the local public schools (Fayette County Public Schools) and seven diverse programs serving preschool children with special needs including private agencies, Head Start, and agencies affiliated with Mental Health/Mental Retardation Services. These agencies formed an interagency group known as the Lexington Preschool Interagency Council (PIPC) to direct the transition process. This group has since gone on to engage in a variety of interagency activities. It has also stimulated development of more than forty other PIPCs in Kentucky and other states.

In 1989, STEPS was funded for Outreach, again for three years. The Outreach Project will disseminate and replicate the STEPS Model throughout the state of Kentucky, in conjunction with the Kentucky Department of Education (responsible for services to children with handicaps ages three to five), the Kentucky Cabinet for Human Resources, Department for Mental Health/Mental Retardation (Lead Agency for services to disabled children birth through two), and Head Start.

By the end of the Outreach Project, a statewide training and technical assistance network will be in place for transition from early intervention programs to preschool programs and from preschool programs to school age programs (that is sending and receiving agencies). The transition model described has evolved to include all children, with and with out disabilities, in the agencies represented. This will include the following.

1. Regional interagency teams of core facilitators that have the skills and materials necessary for conducting STEPS Model training and replication in local communities. Core facilitators will include representation from the three regional networks in Kentucky responsible for training and technical assistance to local programs:
   a. Five Kentucky Department of Education, Early Childhood Regional Training Centers for local districts.
   b. Four Head Start Specially Funded Cluster Coordinators.
   c. Fourteen Mental Health/Mental Retardation (MH/MR) regions.
2. A statewide network of transition model replication sites in integrated educational settings involving, in each locale at least one school district, MH/MR early intervention program and Head Start Program.
3. Local program staff will be trained in the STEPS Model and their roles in child preparation and the transition process.
4. Children and families will participate in effective transition procedures adopted by the fourteen replication sites.

The STEPS Model focuses on the process of transition. This process oriented model includes four components which are described below.

ADMINISTRATION (INTERAGENCY COORDINATION AND POLICY DEVELOPMENT)

The administration component includes both getting the job done (process) and getting along with others (interagency coordination). It creates the atmosphere of cooperation needed for transition. It coordinates the other three STEPS Model components related to the child, the child's family, and staff. This structure involves interagency coordination between the sending and the receiving agency(ies). It answers transition questions of who, what, where, when, why, how, and involves the development of:

- chains of command within participating agencies
- an effective vehicle for communication and problem solving
- clarification of roles and responsibilities of participants at both administrative and instructional levels
- timelines for the transition process
- operational procedures which should be institutionalized within an area or participating agencies

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- forms and other documentation
- staff training and parent involvement in activities related to transition
- mechanisms for programmatic/curricula continuity
- strategies for record keeping and sending
- procedures for referral, evaluation, preparation, placement, and follow up on both child and system level

An effective administrative structure serves several purposes. It shows support at the top, setting a tone of interagency partnership. It provides systematic guidelines for how the process will work, thereby, keeping the process organized. It establishes channels and procedures for ongoing communication and problem solving. In this way, the administrative structure is able to respond and adapt to various legal, funding, and programmatic changes that impact transition. Thus, transition becomes a continually evolving process, helping to insure its appropriateness and relevance to local needs.

STAFF INVOLVEMENT

The skills and information needed for transition may vary in terms of specific content required by staff from the teaching or therapist level to the administrative level or from sending to receiving agency. However, basic needs are common to all staff involved in transition. These are:

- skills for working with families
- interpersonal and group dynamic skills
- knowledge of other agencies' programs, terminology, criteria for service eligibility, strengths, and constraints
- skills in child assessment and instruction relevant to developmental and transition needs
- knowledge of transition policies, procedures, and timelines
- ability to fill out forms correctly so that these can be effective communication tools
- knowledge of other agencies' hierarchies, chain of command, and staff roles and responsibilities.

An ongoing and varied approach should be in place for orienting new staff and updating returning staff. This insures that all staff have the skills, information, materials, and support needed to make transition work effectively for children and families. Strategies include:

- written policies and procedures
- regular staff meetings in which transition is an ongoing agenda item
- group training sessions
- including clearly defined transition responsibilities on job descriptions or in agency policies
- including transition timelines on an agency calendar
- written and videotaped information on other agency programs
- cross program visitation
- administrative support
- informal get-togethers for sending and receiving staff to get to know each other
- opportunities for regular staff feedback to improve transition procedures

FAMILY INVOLVEMENT

Family involvement is a key factor for the successful transition of young children from one agency or program to another. Major goals of the STEPS model are:

(1) to increase the ability of families to actively and effectively participate in the educational process of their children and
(2) to facilitate early linkage of families to the receiving agency.

Because the needs, interests, desire and/or ability for involvement vary among families, the STEPS model incorporates a multi-option family involvement program which provides for a variety of levels of participation. Collaboration between the sending and receiving services can result in a community-wide program benefitting families as they participate in the transition process. Families have the prerogative of selecting the options they feel will be the most beneficial. However, families are encouraged to participate in as many options as feasible. The following options are made available to families:

a. Group Meetings/Trainings - A series of family sessions is planned annually. Sessions are cohosted by the sending and receiving agencies. The topics include: specific disabling conditions (eligibility and terminology); family rights under state and federal laws; IEP development, implementation, and evaluation; programs available in the school systems; and criteria for placement. Sessions may be held on an interagency or individual agency basis. Additional meetings are scheduled as needed.

b. Individual Sessions - the child's teacher in the sending agency is instrumental in explaining to families many aspects of the transition process. This takes place mainly via family conferences. If families generally attend these conferences, this is one option easily available to them. Since the sending agency teachers are directly involved and are a key factor in this option, staff training sessions and materials are available to insure that teachers understood both the transition process and concerns that families may have. Receiving agency personnel are also available to families to provide needed counseling and to answer specific questions. Families frequently need help to negotiate the system and to identify those key people who can help them throughout the transition process, including after the transition placement period.

c. Program Summaries - It is helpful to develop and use materials detailing due process procedures, confidentially, program placement and criteria, the evaluation process, the IEP, receiving agency entrance requirements as well as descriptions of services available in the receiving agency.

d. Video Tapes - These can provide families with basic information regarding class size, eligibility criteria, program overview, and a typical schedule. These video tapes can be made available for families to view either individually or in a group.

e. Family Support Meetings - Family groups provide families with a support group that can continue once children enter the receiving agency. They can include sending and receiving agency families. This makes available an option for developing "buddy systems" during the transition period.

f. Written Communication - This may take the form of a newsletter of other regular written communication to inform and remind families about timely transition meetings, issues, and time lines.

g. Transition IEP Meetings - Families are encouraged to attend this meeting and any other meetings scheduled by the receiving agency. The receiving agency notifies the families and the sending agency staff when these are scheduled and provide them with the evaluation reports that will be reviewed at the IEP meeting. Sending agency staff meet with families prior to the receiving agency IEP meeting to discuss findings in these written reports, to solidify family/sending agency recommendations and to answer any questions families may have about the process. Throughout the year, families receive information about the IEP process through the written summaries, individual assistance, and the group training.

h. Supplemental Services Linkage - Frequently, families need services beyond the scope of educational agencies. This can be a critical issue at transition time, especially when a service has been available through the sending agency but will not be available through the next placement. Families need help in getting the help they need. Families are provided a directory of local supplemental services and information and assistance in accessing these services. Through the STEPS demonstration project, a generic supplemental services guide was developed and is called ACCESS. Further information about this supplemental guide is included in this packet.

i. Program Visitation - It is helpful for families to visit the program that their child will likely attend prior to the IEP meeting. Procedures should be negotiated between the sending and receiving agencies to make this as effective as possible for families and as minimally disruptive for the program visited. Options include (1) individual visitation; (2) group tour, and (3) open house with reception at the program by receiving agency staff and families.

CHILD PREPARATION

Child preparation is a key element of transition. Child preparation includes:

1. assessing the child's readiness for next placement;

2. planning child instruction in the sending agency related to skills the child will need for the receiving agency placement;

3. implementing instructional strategies in the sending agency;

4. conducting follow up activities after placement to insure program continuity.

Research (Vincent, Salisbury, Walter, Brown, & Gruenewald, 1980; Fowler, 1980; Hains, Fowler, Schwartz, Kottwitz, & Rosenkoetter, 1989; Zigler, 1985) has shown that many children who experience failure in kindergarten or first grade have difficulty with social and behavioral skills rather than preacademic skills. In response to this research the STEPS demonstration project developed the Helpful Entry Level Skills Checklist-Revised Edition and Instructional Strategies Manual (2nd Ed.) to help facilitate a smooth transition from one environment to the other. Specific information about the Helpful Entry Level Skills Checklist-Revised Edition and Instructional Strategies Manual (2nd Ed.) are included in this packet.

PROJECT PRODUCTS

During the Demonstration stage of Project STEPS, four (4) products were developed. These products include the following:

ACCESS

The ACCESS Handbook is a generic guide to supplemental services available to parents and families. An excerpt from the booklet is include in this packet.

HELPFUL ENTRY LEVEL SKILLS CHECKLIST-REVISED EDITION

The Helpful Entry Level Skills Checklist-Revised Edition was developed by preschool and public school staff in Lexington, Kentucky and field tested in early intervention programs throughout the state. It is designed to assist preschool teachers in selecting functional skills that children might need in order to make a successful transition into the next environment (i.e. public schools). While the acquisition of these skills is **not** a requirement for placement, it is hoped that the acquisition of these skills will help children in their adjustment in the next school environment and will facilitate a child with disabilities in a placement in the least restrictive environment possible.

The skills targeted in the Helpful Entry Level Skills Checklist-Revised Edition include work skills, communication skills, classroom rules, social behavior skills, and self-management skills. The checklist offers a systematic way of recording and identifying specific functional skills for children going through the transition process, and provides for monitoring of those specific skills targeted for intervention mid-year and at the end of the year.

INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES (SECOND EDITION) MANUAL

An Instructional Strategies Manual (2nd Ed.) has been developed to correlate to the five (5) areas assessed on the Helpful Entry Level Skills Checklist-Revised Edition.

1. Classroom Rules
2. Work Skills
3. Communication Skills
4. Social Behavior Skills
5. Self-Management Skills

The purpose of the manual is to provide teachers at the preschool level, with ideas for increasing the level of independence in young children as they make the transition from preschool to the next educational environment. The manual includes three sections:

1. Overview of Instructional Issues describing basic components of teaching and principles of instruction applicable to preschool children with disabilities (Wolery, M.).
2. Helpful Entry Level Skills Checklist-Revised Edition
3. Instructional Strategies which include for each item on the checklist, teaching ideas for home and school, games, books, kits, and records.

REPLICATION MANUAL (SECOND EDITION)

The Replication Manual provides guidelines for programs and systems wishing to establish or formalize a transition process. The manual includes suggestions based on the development of the STEPS Model with strategies and options that have proven effective in a variety of diverse settings. The manual is divided into six (6) sections which are described below.

Section One - provides an overview of the STEPS Model, including a brief history and a summary of the four(4) major components of the model.

Section Two - discusses the need for an effective transition process and the benefits of interagency coordination.

Sections Three - Six - provides details about the major components of the STEPS Model. Information includes a series of strategies, with objectives and considerations addressed during model development, followed by steps to address each objective.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT:

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